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SOLARZ/
INTERVIEW

BRINKLEY: John, thank you. Coming next, Rep. Stephen Solarz from New York, from the House Foreign Affairs Committee, who has been a critic of the whole Grenada operation.

BRINKLEY: Mr. Solarz in New York, thanks very much for coming in and talking with us. Delighted to have you. SOLARZ: Good to be here, David.

BRINKLEY: Here with me are George Will of ABC News, and Sam Donaldson, ABC News White House correspondent. Mr. Solarz, you have been critical of the Grenada operation. What, if you were making the decisions, what would you have done? SOLARZ: Well, my position David, has been that, if in fact it can be demonstrated that the Americans on Grenada were in jeopardy, or if it becomes clear that Cuba was transforming Grenada into a base for aggression and subversion in the Caribbean, then what we did was justified. But at least, as of a few days ago, it was by no means clear that the lives of the students were in jeopardy. My understanding is, for example, that the authorities on Grenada had offered on several occasions to permit the Americans who were there to leave, and we apparently made no serious effort whatsoever, to contact the authorities in an effort to make an arrangement for the students on the island to leave. In so far as the extent to which Cuba was attempting to utilize Grenada as a base for aggression and subversion in the Caribbean is concerned, I want to hear what the Congressional delegation which has just visited Grenada has to say. If the arms we've discovered there were clearly far in excess of any legitimate requirements on the part of the Grenadian militia, then I think a good case can be made that we had a responsibility to protect the other Democratic countries of the Caribbean from Cuban aggression. But so far, it seems to me, that case has not yet been definitively established.

BRINKLEY: So if the Reagan administration's description of this operation turns out to your satisfaction, you will support it? SOLARZ: If the arguments which have been advanced by the administration turn out to be, once the press and the Congress has had an opportunity to examine them, to be accurate, then I think what they did made sense, but I think we have to keep a couple of things in mind. For one thing, the administration, as you know, in fact prohibited the press from going onto the island until after the invasion was already well underway, and then, the reporters who were there, were clearly restricted in terms of their access. Secondly, I think we do have to recognize that while we have clearly succeeded in making possible the restoration of democracy on Grenada, which is unquestionably a plus, that we've also paid a very heavy price for what we've done. We've generated very serious concerns on the part of our allies in Europe at a time when we're about to proceed with the deployment of the Euro-missiles. That has created great problems with friendly governments in that part of the world. We've clearly produced an intensification of anti-Americanism in Central America. We have acted in ways

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that the international community considers to be a clear violation of international law. I think that what concerns me really about what's happened in Grenada is the extent to which the administration appears to have used force first and diplomacy second, rather than diplomacy first and force second.

DONALDSON: Mr. Solarz, you said a moment ago that if there was a threat to the hemisphere that was clearly established from Grenada, we did the right thing. I want to ask you about Nicaragua. Is there not a threat to the hemisphere clearly established there? Should we not then go into Nicaragua?

SOLARZ: I think it would be a very serious mistake for us to go into Nicaragua. There would be no significant support for such an undertaking on the part of the other countries of the OAS. It would be a violation of our treaty and charter obligations. I think that the differences which we have with Nicaragua, which are very serious ones, are differences which can be resolved at the negotiating table. The Nicaraguans have in effect, said to us, that they would be prepared to enter into an agreement in which, if we undertook not to destabilize them, they would undertake not to destabilize the other countries of the region. We've never really seriously explored that offer, and I think we ought to see whether they're really serious because if they are, then the necessity for any additional military actions would be obviously unnecessary.

DONALDSON: Well now, you say you think it would be a mistake. Do you have any fear that the administration, now having succeeded in Grenada, will say, 'Let's just go ahead, we're on a roll,' and do something more in the way of taking military action against, say, Nicaragua? SOLARZ: I think that is indeed, Sam, a very real possibility because I can conceive of circumstances in which the administration would, in effect, solicit an invitation to invade Nicaragua from some of the other countries of the region. I have in mind El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras. And then say that in response to that invitation, they had taken such an action. Were we to do so, I think it would be a real diplomatic catastrophe for our country. It could lead to a wider war in the region, and particularly in the absence of having made every effort to exhaust the diplomatic and political possibilities for resolving our differences with Nicaragua, I think it would be clearly and utterly unjustified.

WILL: But Congressman, you do seem to be accepting, as a sufficient reason for the use of military force by the United States, the fact that if it is established that there is an export of terrorism or revolution to destabilize other nations. Then, why then, since that clearly, most people think has been established with regard to Nicaragua, do you oppose even covert aid, as it's called now, to carry the fight back to Nicaragua?

SOLARZ: Because I think that our covert operations against Nicaragua have been not only ineffective,

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but counterproductive. They were originally justified on the grounds that this was the only way to stem the flow of arms from Nicaragua to the rebels in El Salvador. Yet it's fairly clear over a year after these operations were launched that we haven't succeeded in doing so, and I think they're counterproductive in the sense that they have enabled the Sandinistas in Nicaragua to legitimize and justify their repression. They've produced an increase in anti-Americanism throughout the hemisphere, and they've created the very real possibility of a larger regional conflict into which we could be very easily sucked in.

WILL: Congressman, as you use the word counterproductive, isn't then your objection, prudential or moral? Are you saying it's not wrong, but it just isn't working? And if it could work, would you be for it? SOLARZ: Well, in a certain sense George, I'm saying both. It's prudential in the sense that it clearly hasn't enabled us to achieve our objectives, while it has resulted in an intensification of repression in Nicaragua in in the creation of serious diplomatic problems for our country both in the hemisphere as well as in Europe, but also, moral in the sense that it seems to me that the resort to force always ought to be the last option we use rather than the first. For over a year now, the Nicaraguans have been saying that they are prepared to reach understandings with us at the negotiating table which would presumably result in a reduction of tensions in the region and an end to the flow of arms from their country to El Salvador. Yet we've never really been willing to sit down at the negotiating table with them and resolve those differences peacefully.

BRINKLEY: Mr. Solarz, thank you very much. Thanks for coming in. SOLARZ: Thank you.